

THE
NATURE
REASONABLENESS
AND
ADVANTAGES, 693. c. 1
OF
PRAYER. 6

With an ATTEMPT to answer
The OBJECTIONS against it.

A SERMON

BY

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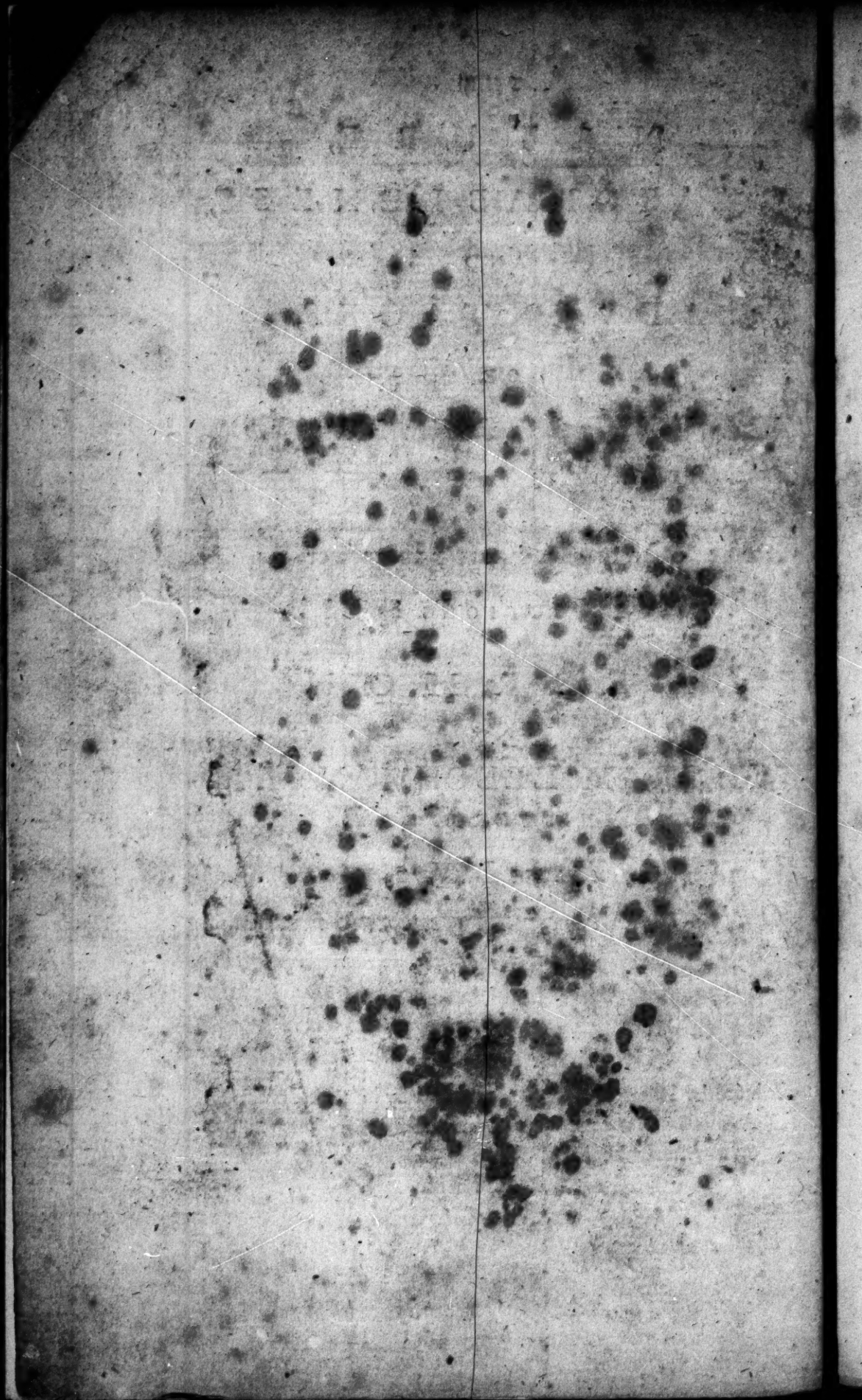
PSALM LXV. 2.

*O thou that hearest Prayer, unto thee shall
all flesh come.*

G L A S G O W,

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M DCC XLIII.



The Nature, Reasonableness, and Advantages of Prayer, &c.

MATTH. XXVI. 41.

—*Pray, that ye enter not into temptation.*

WHEN we consider that our blessed Saviour has commanded us to pray, directed us in what manner we ought to pray, and set us an example of frequent prayer in his own practice; it must appear surprising, that any who pretend to be his followers, should indulge themselves in a determin'd contempt, or careless neglect, of this important duty. But, surprising as it is, a little acquaintance with what passes in the world, puts it beyond all doubt, that the express precepts, and conspicuous example, of the great instructor of mankind, with regard to prayer, are treated slightly, nay even contemptuously, by some of those who call themselves his disciples. To what causes can such strange inconsistency betwixt the profession and practice of Christians be ascrib'd? There may be many and various causes of it, according to the different turn of men's tempers, and pursuits in life. But as it would detain us too long, to enumerate them all; let it suffice at present, to take notice of
A that,

that, which every one who has reflected on what passes in the world in his own time, or has looked into the history of former ages, must have observed ; namely, That the best things may fall into disrepute, and consequently into disuse, for no other reason, but because they have been abused by the weak or the artful and designing part of mankind. Thus, prayer, an excellent thing in itself, and a noble mean of improving our souls in every thing virtuous and praise-worthy, is sunk into contempt among one part of the world, from this accidental circumstance, that weak and well-meaning people have sometimes sullied its native beauty, by a mixture of low superstition ; or, because worldly and designing men have perverted it to serve their wicked purposes.

In discoursing therefore on this subject, 'tis hop'd it may not be unuseful, to endeavour, in the *first* place, To explain the nature of prayer ; and to set it in its true light, by stripping it of all foreign and superfluous circumstances.

In the *second* place, To vindicate it from the objections commonly urged against it. And,

Thirdly, To point out the advantages which arise from the sincere and stedfast practice of it.

Before we enter upon the consideration of these heads, it is proper to observe, that prayer is to be understood in a restrain'd sense in this discourse ; as signifying chiefly that part of devotion commonly call'd *petition* ; as distinguish'd from adoration and thanksgiving, which are frequently comprehended in the meaning of the word prayer.

In order to understand the nature of prayer, let us take notice that the inward acts of mind and
heart

heart exerted in it, from which the outward expressions should flow, and by which they should be animated, are principally these three following.

First, A lively and intimate persuasion that we are utterly insufficient for our own happiness; and that we depend intirely upon our Maker for all we possess here, or hope to enjoy hereafter. That we are in a dependent and indigent, a dark and uncertain state of being, is obvious on the first reflection: We discern, we feel in ourselves many marks of our dependence, our indigence, and ignorance. We find ourselves possessed of an existence which, if we only regard this present life, is confin'd within very narrow bounds, and extends only to a very short period. We see all creatures about us continually disappearing, after having acted their part but a few years on this stage: and we cannot avoid expecting the same fate ourselves; that we must soon withdraw into darkness, and make room for others: as we came into being without our own choice or consent, at the pleasure of another; so we must depart out of this state of being, at the command of him who sent us into it: and even while we are allowed to continue here, we can neither procure for ourselves all the good things we want and desire, nor secure the possession of what we already enjoy: we feel manifold wants which we cannot supply: we groan under manifold imperfections and infirmities which we cannot remove: we are liable to innumerable dangers, many of which we do not foresee; and from others, even when we do see them approaching us, we cannot defend ourselves. We are conscious that we are
not

not only in some instances weak and helpless; but very ignorant, and uncertain of many things which nearly concern us. We know not what shall befall us in our passage thro' this life; nor at what time, in what manner, or circumstances, we shall make our exit from it into another: neither know we what our state, or employment shall be in those other regions, into which we must enter when we depart from this world. But the most lamentable and mortifying ignorance is still behind, namely, ignorance of our duty, or the great rule of life; ignorance of our true happiness, and the way that leads unto it. Tho' we have some general knowledge of our duty, from the light of reason and revelation; yet we find that we are not only in danger of erring, but frequently do err in applying general rules to particular instances of our conduct: daily experience convinces us, that a regard to worldly interests, and the strength of irregular appetites and passions, greatly darken our understandings, and occasion such false judgments concerning our behaviour, as necessarily lead us astray from the path of life: and, surely, we have great reason to dread the consequences of a departure from the law of righteousness, under the government of the righteous Judge of all the earth. In like manner, tho' we have some general and speculative knowledge concerning our true happiness, or chief good; yet our own experience, as well as observation of the world, may convince us, that our views of it are not so clear and striking as, at all times, to prevent our pursuing false appearances of it: for alas! how frequently, how fatally are we disappointed; finding those things
vain

vain and unsatisfactory, in which our fond imagination had promised us happiness? We have no security in ourselves, that we shall not be guilty of the same transgressions of the law of virtue, and the same departures from the path of happiness, in the succeeding stages of our lives, that we have been, in the former ones. Now, every man who has seriously considered how wretched and helpless he is in himself, will find the necessity of flying out of himself, and of taking refuge in *Him* who made him, and upholds him in being. Which leads us to the

Second act of the soul exerted in prayer, namely, the lifting it up with the utmost ardor, to that greatest and best of beings, who brought us into life, and assigned us our station in it; entreating him to teach us what part we should act; to dispell all that darkness of understanding, which is so apt to mislead us from the right path; to forgive our sins and follies; to deliver us from the fatal consequences of all our errors; to preserve us from relapsing into them; and to guide us safely to some proper mansions of rest, of light, and joy, beyond the grave. Every one who has imprinted on his mind a just sense of his ignorance, weakness, guilt, and danger, will find an inward necessity constraining him to have recourse, in fervent prayer, to the great Author of his being, to conduct him safely through this stage of his existence; to continue his providential care, in guiding him through the valley and shadow of death; and to settle him at last in some happier place of abode.

The *third* act of mind exerted in prayer, is a firm belief, and assured trust, in that God to whom

whom we pray, and on whom we depend, that he will not only always do what is best, what tends to the greatest good of the whole system of intelligent beings; but that he will, sooner or later, bring every one who sincerely seeks wisdom from him, to the possession of perfect virtue and everlasting happiness. Without this confidence in the infinite mercy of the great Father of all, there would be no foundation for prayer, nor encouragement to the practice of it. When we inquire into the doctrine of divine revelation on this head, we find lively and unshaken acts of trust in God are by it represented as equally necessary and essential parts of prayer, with either of those already mentioned. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them who diligently seek him," *Heb. xi. 6.* If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask it of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering, for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed." *James i. 5, 6.* There are numberless joyful declarations to the same purpose, in the books of the Old Testament: such as, "The Lord is nigh to all them that call upon him in truth: he will fulfill the desire of them that fear him; he also will hear their cry, and will save them." *Psalms cxlv. 18, 19.* Our blessed Saviour hath expressly renew'd and confirmed all those delightful promises, which were published by the inspired writers under former dispensations. "Ask, (says he,) and it shall be given; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto

“ to you : for every one that asketh receiveth ;
 “ and he that seeketh findeth ; and to him that
 “ knocketh it shall be opened : or, what man is
 “ there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will
 “ he give him a stone ; or if he ask a fish, will
 “ he give him a serpent ? if ye then being evil,
 “ know how to give good gifts unto your chil-
 “ dren, how much more shall your Father which
 “ is in heaven give good things to them who
 “ ask him ? ” *Matth. vii. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.* That these
 particular and positive declarations of the will of
 God are more fully satisfactory to the human
 mind, and more directly calculated to encourage
 the study and practice of true religion, than the
 general persuasion that God will always do what
 is fittest and best, is so evident, that it is need-
 less to spend time in illustrating it. What great
 numbers of mankind are capable of understand-
 ing a plain and express promise, and of drawing
 the highest consolation and encouragement from
 it, in the course of a virtuous life, who could
 never have reasoned out to themselves a clear
 and just character of the Deity ; nor inferred
 from it, that he would constantly and universally
 connect felicity with virtue ? This plainly shews
 us, that it is an unspeakable advantage, to enjoy
 such a clear revelation of the will of God ; as ba-
 nishes all doubt and uncertainty, concerning the
 method in which he treats his apostate and guilty
 creatures. But, at the same time, it may be ob-
 served, that there is good ground to hope it al-
 ways has been, is at present, and will for ever
 be, the great, the standing, the invariable law
 of the divine government, to bestow wisdom, vir-
 tue, and happiness, upon all those who ask them

with unfeigned sincerity of heart; even tho' they never heard of these comfortable promises on which our souls rest securely; for it is very observable, that these joyful assurances from the great Father of all, that he will be found of those who seek him, are exprest in such general terms, as to exclude no one, of whatever nation or country. Besides, nothing can be more agreeable to the all-perfect character of him, who is no *respector of persons*, and accepteth those in every nation who fear him, and work righteousness; than to befriend and assist all those who sincerely seek his aid. May we not then indulge ourselves in the charitable hope, where ever there was any one found, even in the heathen world, groaning under a sense of his deep ignorance and depravity, and earnestly panting after light and purity; that God never did deny his grace to such a person, but enlightened him with as much knowledge as was necessary for purifying his heart, and guiding him forward in the paths of goodness? As it must be acknowledged, that that sincerity, and honesty of heart, which prompts any one to seek direction and assistance from above, is itself a gift, a special gift of God; so it should likewise be owned, that there is no reason to suspect, that God will deny what farther light and assistance may be necessary for him, whom he has already distinguished so far with his favour, as to bestow upon him sincerity and uprightness of heart; provided he maintains and cherishes that lovely disposition, and earnestly asks the direction of heaven in true humility.

Before we conclude this head of the discourse,
let

let it be remarked, in order to prevent mistakes, that, when it is said, "God will accomplish the desires of those who seek him;" this must always be understood of those who seek him with real sincerity and humility of soul, (virtues indispensably required in the gospel of Jesus Christ;) and who, in a constant dependence on the divine assistance, exert their utmost endeavours to do whatever they can discern to be the will of God. Farther, this doctrine of the certainty of obtaining our requests, must only be understood of what is necessary for enlightening and assisting us in the paths of virtue; and should by no means be extended to a thousand other things, which we may desire to know or possess, tho' they have no inseparable connection with our virtue or happiness. We may be apt to wish, with the greatest fondness, for uninterrupted health, ease, and pleasure, through our whole lives: But, in these things, we must not hope to be gratified. We must learn to leave the all-wise disposer of every event, to lead us to happiness, in whatever path he pleases; whether it be the hard and rugged one of adversity and affliction, or the more soft and smooth one of prosperity and joy. And, lastly, let us carefully remember, that there is no ground to expect, that even our best and most pious desires are to be accomplished, all at once, and in an instant: We must wait with patience, till God shall finish his own work, by the various methods of his providence and grace: 'Tis with the works of God within us, as with the works of nature without us: They are not completed all at once, and in an instant:
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They require time, and are brought to perfection by slow and insensible degrees. A child must have time to become a man. The tree which is but just now planted, must have time to grow up to its full maturity, and bring forth fruit. In like manner, the progress of the soul towards perfection in virtue, is by slow advances: Bad habits must be gradually weakened and overcome; and good dispositions must be raised to their proper height, by an almost imperceptible increase. In a word, tho' we may be assured that our heavenly Father will bring us to perfection in glory and happiness, at last; yet it is only by the slow and almost indiscernable steps of his providence and grace, that we must be ripened for it.

Now, from this view of prayer, it appears, in the first place, that there is a foundation laid for it, in the nature and circumstances of mankind, as dependent, ignorant, weak and guilty creatures; and in those manifestations their Creator hath given them of his glorious perfections, as employed for their safety and welfare. And, in the second place, from what has been said of the inward acts of mind and heart exerted in prayer, we may infer, that every well-disposed person (who will be at the pains to consider things impartially, and to distinguish betwixt pure prayer itself, and those odd and foolish things, which may sometimes mingle with it) must see, that *it* is a thing highly reasonable; that *it* is unavoidable to those who allow themselves to think seriously; that *it* is fit, and becoming, in the present state and circumstances of mankind; and that *it* has a natural tendency to
beget

beget and promote all those amiable and important dispositions of mind, which render men happy in themselves, useful in this world, or fit for another. And, in the third place, this explication of the nature of prayer may furnish us with proper answers to the objections against it, commonly insisted on by those whose minds are under the power of prejudices. Which leads us to the

II. Head proposed above, namely, to vindicate prayer from the objections commonly urged against it.

1st. Then, it is objected by some, "that an omniscient God knows already what we want, before we ask it; and to what purpose do we ask those things which he already knows we stand in need of?" The answer to this objection is evident: That the design of prayer is not to inform God of things which he did not know before. This is so far from being the design of it, that every one, even of the meanest capacity, understands, that, when he addresses himself to his Maker, he ought to have it expressly in his consideration, that he to whom he prays, knows all his wants already, every circumstance of his condition, and every thought of his heart. The real design of prayer is, in the first place, to express, under a lively impression of the presence of God, the sense we have of our dependence upon him, of our manifold wants, and that he alone is able to supply them; and to make this sense more deep and affecting. Now, since it is a certain truth, that we depend upon God; and have numberless wants, the supplying of which we can expect from God alone; is it not highly

ly reasonable and natural, that we should acknowledge this in his presence, and express to him our desires, and our dependence upon him? Does not such acknowledgements frequently made to him, naturally tend to strengthen our sense of this truth, and to make it more deeply affecting? Will any one venture to assert that this truth is not to be thus owned? Where is the man, who dares pretend to have credit and authority sufficient to controul this truth? Is not this a truth owned by angels in heaven, as well as men upon earth? Is not this a truth which shall be for ever owned by a dependent world? Besides, is not this a truth, in which we are deeply interested? Is it not of the highest importance toward cultivating all other good dispositions, that we have the most lively impressions of this truth, and use the most natural means of making them lively? As our dependence upon God is the primary, the most important of all relations, and the foundation of all others; the deepest sense and acknowledgement of it must be our first, our supreme, and our most natural and most indispensable duty: our obligation to it can never be extinguished any other way than either by annihilating us, depriving us of our reason, or rendering us independent.

Is it not manifest that an intimate and habitual sense of our dependent state, has a mighty influence on all the duties which we owe to our Creator, and to one another? The strength of our love, the warmth of our gratitude to our Maker, and the stability of our confidence in him, must rise or fall in proportion as the persuasion of our dependence upon him is fainter or stronger.

ger. And as nothing has a more powerful tendency to inspire us with love, benignity, and compassion to our fellow-creatures, than considering them as the children of the same great Parent of all, equally depending upon him with ourselves, for all they enjoy here, or hope for hereafter; so, nothing can more effectually check that pride, selfishness and vanity, which leads us to contemn and injure our brethren of mankind, than an habitual sense, that we are as really dependent creatures as they are; that we are as insufficient for our own happiness as they are; and that he on whom we depend can soon raise them to our state, or thrust us down into theirs: Why, then, may not this truth, most certain in itself, and most important in its consequences, be owned in the most publick and religious manner; in that manner, which naturally tends to make the deepest impressions of it upon our hearts? and *that*, certainly, is the owning it in direct addresses to God himself. Why should we not embrace every proper opportunity of acknowledging it, with all those affecting and solemn circumstances, which may contribute to imprint a deep and abiding conviction of it on our own minds, and those of all around us? But to speak more directly to the head of petitioning; it is,

2dly, A further design of prayer, to express, under an actual sense of the presence of God, our earnest desires of having all those sentiments and pious dispositions, which it is proper for us to entertain and cultivate, considered as dependent, reasonable, social, and guilty creatures. If we feel earnest breathings after happiness, after the means that lead to it, and all those pure and worthy

thy affections which are the principal ingredients of it, we certainly ought to encourage and favour them. If then we find ardent desires arising within us, after the knowledge, the favour, the resemblance, and enjoyment of God, why may we not express them in that manner, and in those circumstances, which will contribute most to cultivate and increase such honourable and worthy motions of the rational soul? and, surely, the addressing such desires to God is the most effectual method of strengthening them. If we believe that God can accomplish these worthy desires, why may we not ask it of him? If we hope and trust in him that he will sooner or later accomplish them, why may we not declare our joyful expectations of being at last possessed of them? If we feel our souls ascending to God in love, joy, and praise, is it not reasonable, that we should indulge those delightful sentiments, and, by repeated acts, confirm and improve them?

If these inward emotions of heart are just and natural, if we cannot but approve them, if we judge them worthy of being cherished and strengthened; why may we not give full vent to them, in all proper methods of outward expression? and, if our own experience, and the testimony of the best of mankind inform us, that the yielding up our souls to the full influences of devout affections, and giving them full scope in voice and language, especially in addresses to God, are the most effectual methods of increasing that strength and fervour, and of spreading their happy effects thro' the whole of human life; it surely must be our truest wisdom, to employ
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all these means of establishing and perfecting them.

2dly. It is further objected, "That, since God is infinite in goodness, he is always disposed to bestow on his creatures whatever is proper for them; and, since he is infinite in wisdom, he will always choose the fittest time, and best manner of bestowing it. To what purpose, then, do we entreat him to do, what he certainly will do, without any sollicitation or importunity?" To this it may be answered; That, as it is not the design of prayer to give information to our Creator of things he was not acquainted with before; so, neither is it the design of *it* to move his affections, as good speakers move the hearts of their hearers by the pathetic arts of oratory; nor to raise his pity, as beggars by their importunities and tears work upon the compassion of the by-standers. God is not subject to those sudden passions and emotions of mind which we feel; nor to any change of his measures and conduct, by their influence: He is not wrought upon and changed by our prayers; for, "with him there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning." Prayer only works its effect upon *us*; as it contributes to change the temper of our minds; to beget or improve right dispositions in them; to lay them open to the impressions of spiritual objects, and thus qualify us for receiving the favour and approbation of our Maker, and all those assistances which he has promised to those who call upon him in sincerity and in truth: The efficacy of prayer does not ly in the mere asking; but in its being the means of producing that frame of mind, which

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qualifies us to receive. If it is still urged, "Why do we ask, if God does not grant merely for the asking?" To this I reply, That, if by asking be understood the uttering of words, and using a voice and language, in which all the symptoms of earnestness and importunity appear; this external part of asking, I own, serves no purpose, with respect to God; and the only use of it is to engage the attention, and raise the devotion of our own minds, or those of others. But, if by asking, be understood the inward desires and breathings of the soul after those heavenly dispositions, in which the perfection and happiness of our natures chiefly consist: in this sense of it, I assert, that these are the beginnings of virtue: These are the means of improving it, both in the nature of things, and by the positive appointment of God: These are inseparable from real virtue, as long as it is capable of improvement; which may be for ever, for any thing we know to the contrary: These desires, I say, are altogether unavoidable, and must arise in the breasts of all who have any degree of real goodness. Whoever has had the least glimpse of the beauty and excellence of real virtue, is not satisfied with such views of it as he has already attained; but pants after a clearer and stronger view of its everlasting worth and importance. Whoever has felt that pleasing serenity, that lively joy, and delightful liberty, which arises from any considerable degree of superiority to worldly passions, longs with ardor, nay, almost, with impatience, to obtain an intire conquest over them: and whoever has tasted the sublime, the divine pleasures of true devotion, breathes with the greatest

greatest fervour after the full and uninterrupted enjoyment of them. To those, then, who ask why we cherish the inward desires after the heavenly graces, and study to cultivate them by prayer, the answer is plain; That the doing so is the necessary consequence of real virtue, both in its first and feeblest, and in its highest and most perfect state, at least while in this world.

But, if it should be still urged, "That, tho' we must have the desires, tho' we ought to entertain and cultivate them, yet this is no sufficient reason for our offering them up to God, and entreating him to accomplish them: why may we not desire all the divine virtues, and frequently repeat the desire in our minds with pleasure, and with ardor, without directly addressing it to God, whose infinite goodness inclines him to fulfil it as soon as his unerring wisdom sees fit?" To this I answer, that it is impossible for the human mind to stop at the desire; it feels a powerful impulse, urging it forward to beg God to bestow what it wishes for with vehemence: And this very argument, which is urged against the lifting up holy desires to God, (*viz.* that he is infinite in goodness, and willing to gratify them,) is a principal motive for offering them up; and makes it impossible for a well-disposed mind to abstain from it. Since, then, there is a determination in our nature, leading us to pray; since there is a law of external revelation commanding us to pray; since our own minds, on the calmest reflection, approve of praying, as being an explicate and natural acknowledgment of our dependence on our Maker, and a declaration, that we will grateful-

ly receive the blessings we pray for, as the free gifts of his bounty; and since prayer is a mean of enlivening and strengthening the best dispositions in our souls; we may conclude, that it is not only an innocent and harmless exercise; but, that it is our indispensable duty to be frequently employed in it.

Further, we may add to the preceeding reasonings, that it is highly probable it would be neither a wise nor kind conduct in Providence, to bestow heavenly wisdom, worthy dispositions, and the happiness that accompanies them, on those who neglect to own it, and who will not acknowledge their dependence upon it. Is it not highly credible, that the infinite wisdom and goodness of the great Creator of all things, has established a standing law in the government of his rational subjects, that those dispositions which qualify them for his approbation and favour, shall be bestowed on none, but those who sincerely humble themselves to ask them? Nay, is it not solemnly declared in the revelation God hath given us, that this is, in fact, the great law and rule of his conduct, that for these blessings “ he
 “ must be sought after by the house of Israel.
 “ Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will
 “ deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me. *Psal.*
 “ 1. 15. The Lord is nigh unto them that call
 “ upon him, and he will fulfill the desire of
 “ them that fear him; he will hear their cry,
 “ and save them. *Psal.* cxlv. 18. God resisteth
 “ the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.
 “ *James* iv. 6. The meek God will guide in
 “ judgment: and the meek will he teach his
 “ way. *Psal.* xxv. 9. Do not our own minds
 approve

approve of it as a just and reasonable constitution, that the sincere, the humble, and pious petitioner should obtain his requests, while the neglecter of God, the unthinking, the proud, and unsubmitting sinner should be neglected, and continue to want, what he will not humble himself to ask from the divine bounty? Nay, must it not be owned, that we can discern wise and just reasons, why this should be an established law of the divine government? Is it not manifest, that sincerity, humility, and earnest desires after wisdom, and virtue, are dispositions previously necessary, in the nature of things, to prepare our minds for receiving heavenly wisdom, and all the virtues which accompany it? Is not a deep sense of our own ignorance, and earnest panting after the wisdom that comes from above, a fitter disposition for attaining it, than a fond conceit of our own wisdom? Is not a consciousness of the manifold disorders of our hearts, a more proper situation of mind, for receiving that grace which must rectify them, than a vain and foolish imagination, that all is right within already? Is not a sorrowful sense of our great loss, while we are void of those divine virtues, which form the image of God in us, the most natural preparation for being beautified with them? If then this sincerity and humility, these ardent desires of spiritual blessings, and this deep sense of our imperfections, are naturally pre-requisite to our receiving these divine favours; is it supposable, (where these previous qualifications are found in a just degree, and withal a lively persuasion that it is from God alone we can obtain these solid blessings,) that the human heart can

can avoid flying to him for them, by the most ardent invocations and prayers?

To sum up the whole argument; since there is an inward impulse, prompting us to pray; since there are frequent precepts of external revelation commanding us to pray; and, since it is the established law of the righteous government of God, over the intelligent world, that spiritual blessings shall be bestowed on those only who humble themselves to pray for them; we may infer, that prayer is so far from implying any just reflection upon the perfect wisdom and goodness of the great Governor of all things, that it is a just compliance with that constitution of things which he hath appointed; and an harmonizing (so to speak) with the wise order of his Providence. Since prayer is appointed by God to be the means of producing, preserving, and increasing in us the best and worthiest dispositions; to practise it is nothing else but a concurring with him, in his great design of establishing the happiness of his creation.

3dly. It is further urged, " That there is no
 " just ground of expecting any immediate light
 " or aid from heaven, in consequence of the
 " most sincere and fervent prayer: For, after
 " the most accurate inquiry that can be made in-
 " to the workings of the human mind, there is
 " nothing to be perceived, but what may be
 " the natural effect of proper motives and argu-
 " ments." In answer to this; let it be obser-
 ved, that, even supposing there is no good dis-
 position awakened in the human soul, where the
 proper considerations and motives have not been
 laid before it; yet, there may be good reasons
 for

for believing, that there is some secret and undiscernable aid of heaven concurring with those considerations and motives ; displaying their whole importance and force to the mind ; fixing the attention of it to consider them ; and laying it open to feel their whole power and influence. This at least must be allowed, that the same motives, laid before the minds of different persons, do not produce the same effects : In two persons, who seem equally capable of discerning the strength and force of motives ; who seem to have bestowed equal attention in weighing them ; and whose passions seem to be equally capable of resisting them ; the effects they produce are widely different. Besides, it deserves our most attentive consideration, that there is no inseparable connection betwixt the clearest and justest views of the excellence and importance of moral and spiritual objects, and those feelings and affections of heart which correspond to them : a man may have the justest and sublimest ideas of all the human, social, and divine virtues, while he remains in a great measure, or altogether, without any feeling of them in his heart. There are many instances in the world, of men, who have formed the purest and most exalted conceptions of the divine perfections, who can speak of them with dignity, and are highly delighted with the theory and contemplation of them ; and yet feel almost nothing of that true devotion of heart, which should be awakened by them. In like manner, a man may have his mind stored with the most exact and delightful speculations concerning the beauty and worth of temperance, integrity, sincerity, benevolence, friendship, humility, and

and all the human and social virtues; may be capable of speaking and writing about them, to admiration; while he still continues under the power of the lowest sensuality, and a selfish malignant disposition. On the other hand; it may be observ'd, that those who are less acquainted with the delightful theories of virtue and religion, who have not such exact and perfect notions of them, and who, from a necessary attention to other things, are seldom employed in thinking on them; yet are more uniformly governed in life, by the natural influence of the pious and virtuous dispositions themselves, than the greatest philosopher or divine, who spends his days in contemplating the ideas of them, and those views of things which should excite them. Now, as it is the good dispositions themselves, that constitute the soul and essence of virtue; as they only give the true dignity to our minds, and beauty to our lives; as they only can form the character which is worthy and acceptable in the sight of God; so, they are always represented in scripture, as the fruits and effects of the Holy Spirit. *Gal. v. 22, 23.* "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." From these observations, it plainly appears, that after we have got the purest and clearest ideas of religion, and the fullest view of those motives which should engage us to the practice of it; there is still ground to pray, that God may bless us with those divine affections of heart, which are the only real ornaments to our souls, the only lasting foundations of their peace and happiness. Our ideas are but pictures and images of the things themselves:
and

and, as the picture of a feast cannot satisfy our hunger, nor the picture of a fire warm and enlighten us; so, the finest ideas of virtue and religion cannot make us good and happy, without those dispositions of heart, which should be raised and kept alive by them.

It may be also observed, as a thing of very considerable importance in the present argument, that the power of mankind over their own inward dispositions, or those of others, is not so great, as some seem to imagine. No man will venture to boast that he can by any one effort, how vigorous soever, or even by repeated efforts, resolutions, and endeavours, raise the virtuous dispositions in his own soul, to such a degree of strength, that they shall uniformly and constantly prevail over all the passions which may oppose them: Far less can any one pretend, that it is in his power to new-model the hearts of others, and change their dispositions, from the worst to the best, at his pleasure. Excepting our Saviour, an infallible teacher of virtue, or a master of the divine art of forming the noblest and worthiest dispositions in the human mind, never yet appeared in the world. The wisest, the best, and tenderest parent, cannot by all his art, and most assiduous endeavours, bestow true virtue on his dearest child: the most learned, most virtuous, and affectionate tutor, cannot form it in his beloved pupil. If an infallibly successful teacher of virtue could be found any where, what an invaluable treasure would he be; and how worthy to be sought after in the remotest corners of the world? No doubt, when one reads pious books, hears virtuous discourse, sees worthy examples, and has enjoyed the be-

nefit of the fineft instructions, he may; or rather, he muft be furnifhed with the juftest and moft amiable ideas of the whole glorious train of virtues: But, it will not follow hence, that he muft have fuch a relifh for the virtues themfelves, as fhall constantly render him fuperior to the temptations of the world; or even, on the whole, make him a man of a virtuous character. This doctrine of the inability of mankind to make themfelves virtuous and happy, and of the need of affiftance from above, in this divine work, has been fo deeply felt by the more thinking and confiderate part of them, that it extorted a confeffion of it, even from thofe, whofe speculative principles feemed to lead them to a denial of it. For we find that feft of the heathen philofophers, who laid the foundation of their fyftem in the diftinction betwixt things in our power, and out of our power; (meaning by the former, our good difpofitions, refolutions, and actions; and, by the latter, the external enjoyments of the world, which depend on a thoufand accidents, over which we have no command;) even they, I fay, in oppofition to their favourite diftinction, inculcated the ufefulness and importance of prayer. †

To all thefe obfervations we may add, that there has always been a very general and ftrong propenfity in mankind to believe, that God makes impreffions on the minds of men, in an immediate manner. And of this it were eafy to bring numberlefs proofs, from the Poets, Philofophers, Orators, and Hiftorians of former ages. I am very fenfible that it will be objected, that few pretend

† Marcus Antoninus, Book IX. and Simplicius' Commentary on Epictetus, at the end.

rend that they themselves have felt any foreign and divine influence, which they could certainly distinguish from the natural and ordinary operations of their own minds: but, to this one may reply, that it may be the peculiar excellence of the Deity's method of operation, that it is imperceptible in itself, and only discernible by its effects. Thus, tho' we do not feel the Power of God, upholding us in life, yet we do not know but it may be as really exerted every moment, in supporting our being, as it was at first, in bringing us into it. Besides, it may be said, that many good men, quite free of superstition, and remarkable for strength of mind, have declared that they have felt secret and sudden influences, determining them to particular steps of conduct, which had very remarkable effects, as to the happiness and usefulness of their after-life: and, does not almost every one feel thoughts, resolutions, and projects, springing up within him, which he is not conscious he has been led to, by any former course of his reading, conversation, or reasoning? Nay, if there is any credit to be given to human testimony, must we not believe that intimations have been made to good men, of future events, which greatly concern'd themselves, or the society to which they belonged?

To conclude; Those who will not allow any immediate influence of the Deity upon the human mind, but ascribe every thing there to the natural force of arguments and motives; ought to consider, that it is only going one step farther, and they come to God, and must own him as the original author of all. It is God who has made the mind of man capable of perceiving

motives, and of being wrought upon by them: it is God, who, in the course of his providence, has presented such a train of motives to any one's mind, as has engaged him to practise all the virtues of a holy life: to God, therefore, the praise of it is to be given. And there still remains abundant reason to pray to him, that he may, in the unsearchable wisdom and goodness of his providence, continue to present such views of things to the mind, as may determine it always to choose the virtuous and worthy part.

Fourthly, But should any one object in this manner (which I believe will scarce be done by any considerate man) waving the debate about the aids which may be obtained by prayer, yet alledging that he has no need of it: "What should I pray for? Shall I pray that God may enlighten my mind with the knowledge of my duty, and make me perceive the excellence and importance of piety, sincerity, truth, integrity, charity, and all those virtues which dignify the souls of men, and beautify their lives and manners? I know all these things already, and conduct my life by them."

How much is it to be wish'd, that every one who thinks or speaks in this manner, would seriously ask himself;---- Have I already attain'd as clear and distinct views of the worth and importance of all the heavenly virtues, as are attainable by mankind? Have they as sovereign and commanding an influence over my heart and life, as ever they had over any of the sons of men? Am I sure there is nothing farther to be seen, nothing higher to be felt? What if human

man nature is capable of stronger and brighter views of the worth and majesty of the great virtues of the spiritual life, than I have yet obtain'd? Nay, may I not suppose that many of the children of men have actually attain'd them, and conducted their lives more unerringly under the power and influence of them? Have I any ambition remaining? any thing of that divine ambition of aiming at a transcendancy in what is great and good, in what is the sole glory of a reasonable being? Shall I not then aspire after the highest sense, and strongest impression of those things, that my nature is capable of? Is there a great Father of lights, the enlightner of all minds, the everlasting lover and friend of truth and righteousness? Has he declared that he is ready and willing to enlighten those who ask wisdom from him? Has he assured us, that there is a dispensation of grace and light carrying on in the world, by his Son and Holy Spirit; by which those blessings are perpetually imparted to all who sincerely ask them? Has he already enlightened, in a superior manner, those souls which lay themselves open to his influence? And, shall I refuse to ask this heavenly wisdom, and live contented with a smaller portion of it, when a greater may be obtain'd! Surely no true lover of virtue, no one who has any real greatness of mind, can bear the thought. But, perhaps, the objector will reply: "What tho' I have not the
" highest and most striking sense of the everlast-
" ing worth and beauty of those things; yet I
" have as just and strong a sense of them, as is
" sufficient for all the purposes of human life;

“ as much as will enable me to withstand the
“ temptations of the world, and render me su-
“ perior to them. I am so thoroughly per-
“ suaded of the excellence and value of all the
“ moral and divine virtues, that I am in no
“ danger of being seduc’d into a forgetfulness
“ of the duties which I owe to God, to man-
“ kind, or to myself. I have such a perfect
“ abhorrence of every thing base and unwor-
“ thy, of every thing that approaches to a de-
“ parture from what is just, becoming, and ho-
“ nest in human life, that it will be an everlast-
“ ing security to my virtue: Or, if at any time,
“ thro’ the force of some great and sudden
“ temptations, I should be guilty of some small
“ failure, I have nothing more to do, but call
“ up the strength and resolution of my mind,
“ and all things shall be right again.” In an-
swer to all this, in the first place, it may be ob-
served, that, supposing all that true, which
vain men represent to their own conceited
minds; tho’ there should be no need for prayer;
yet, surely, there is the justest ground for ano-
ther part of devotion, thankfulness and praise.
Is it not reasonable, that those persons should
lift up their hearts and hands in gratitude to that
God, who has hitherto preserved them from
the temptations of the world, and enabled them
to lead a blameless life? Is it not God, who
made them capable of discerning the honest,
the just, and worthy part, and enabled them to
follow it? Is it not God, who planted the good
dispositions in their hearts, and has not suffered
them to be overcome by the contrary passions?
Can any blessing be greater, or afford juster
ground

ground for the most sincere praise and thankfulness? Nay, can any thing be more reasonable, than that they should pray to Heaven with the greatest sincerity, for the continuance of such an inestimable blessing? Are we not always depending on the providence of God for it? To how many diseases and accidents are we exposed, which no human wisdom can foresee or prevent; by which the strength of our minds may be exceedingly impaired, our tempers fretted and sowed, nay, our rational powers entirely destroyed? But, farther,

Allow me in the *second* place, to exhort and beseech those, if there are any such, who imagine they have maintained their integrity invariably, thro' the whole course of their lives, (without the assistance of prayer, or any acts of trust and confidence in God,) to take an attentive review of their whole past conduct, and compare it impartially with the purity and perfection of the divine law; and then, let them honestly declare if they have discerned nothing otherwise than it ought to have been: will any one venture to assert, that, upon the strictest examination, he finds he has not departed from the great rule of what is worthy and good, and that in many instances; or, that he is not conscious to himself, of having neglected many things he ought to have done, might have done, to render either himself or others, wiser, better, or happier? Do not many things occur to him, in the survey of his whole life, which he disapproves, which he would not choose to be guilty of a second time, and which he would endeavour to amend, if he were to pass life over again? I am inclined to believe
there

there is no man, who, upon looking back, will not be sensible he has thought, said, and done many things, which he would not choose to do over again, were he placed in the same circumstances; that he has omitted, foolishly and criminally omitted, to do many things, which he would now joyfully embrace an opportunity of performing, if the like circumstances should present themselves. May it not be further ask'd, How do you know, but that, if you had been fervent in prayer, and with true devotion had lifted up your desires to God, for conduct and direction, you might have been preserved from those crimes, and those omissions of duty, which you cannot now review, without regret and self-condemnation; and been led to the practice of many virtues, and performance of many good offices, the opportunities of which can never be recalled?

May we not further inquire of those who have such complacency, and satisfaction in their own characters and conduct; Do you find nothing in the present temper and disposition of your mind, which you have reason to complain of, and which you desire to have rectify'd? Are there no imperfections to be corrected, no virtuous affections to be refin'd, confirm'd, strengthen'd, and perfected? Are you already possess of that degree of love to God, and true virtue, which pervades the whole soul, controuls the power of all the inferior passions, establishes a perpetual serenity within, and animates you with the utmost joy and alacrity, in practising all the virtues of a worthy life? If ye imagine ye are already rais'd to the utmost summit of perfection; we may safely

ly venture to assert, that ye are mistaken; and, that self-love has blinded your eyes, and made you pass too favourable a sentence upon yourselves. This fond imagination, that ye are already perfect, is almost a demonstration, that ye are yet at a very great distance from it: ye have certainly fix'd too low a standard of religion: your intellectual eye is not quick and piercing enough, to discern the idea of perfection set before you in the law of God, which ye ought perpetually to have in your view, and to be aspiring after, with the utmost ardor. There are but few to be found, who have attained to the justest and highest taste of the true sublime in heart and life: whoever has had a clear and distinct view of it, will not flatter himself that he has reach'd it; nay, he will be fully sensible, that he has not yet approached near it: and, whoever fondly imagines that he is come up to it, has not distinctly perceived it. That man must have a low understanding, and a vain heart, who is satisfy'd with himself; and who fancies he has attain'd to the truly great and perfect in temper and conduct: and, whoever is thus easily satisfy'd with himself, is commonly the only person who is so; or, at least, the number of those will be few, who pass the same judgment on him, that he does on himself. The higher any one advances in religion, his views are proportionably opened and enlarged. That moment the virtuous man has gain'd the victory over some bad passion he has been long struggling with, he sees some other one not quite subdued within him; and, that moment he reaches to some certain pitch of virtue he had in his view, he discerns some higher

E pitch

pitch of it, at a great distance from him: In this, he resembles a traveller in a large champaign country; who, this hour, sees nothing beyond a small eminence, which terminates his view at a distance; the top of which he no sooner gains, than a new extent of country fills his eye, equal to that he has already pass'd. Since, then, there is still something yet unattained in the spiritual life, can we restrain ourselves from praying that the God of grace, the author of every good and perfect gift, would enlighten our eyes to discern it, and inspire us with the divine ambition of aiming and endeavouring to obtain it? Is it not a joyful, nay, a triumphant consideration, that, by the light and assistance of the Holy Spirit of God, we may travel on, from perfection to perfection, and approach nearer and nearer to our Maker, by higher degrees of resemblance?

Further, may we not desire those who imagine they have no need of prayer, to look forward to that part of life they may yet have to pass through? Are they certain they shall never meet with any temptation, that may be an overmatch for that virtue of theirs, which they flatter themselves is so firmly established? May there not be ten thousand circumstances in life, which may endanger their integrity? Every occurrence, every state, every employment, has its peculiar temptations, and may occasion a departure from the right path. What security have we in ourselves? Are we not conscious that our reason is weak, in many things clouded by ignorance, blinded by prejudices, seduced by appetites, and over-ruled by passions, and unreasonable affections? When we look abroad into the world,
how

how many melancholy instances may we mark out, of the seemingly firmest virtue, soon shaken, and overcome? Must we not own that wiser, greater, and better men than we can pretend to be, have yielded to the force of temptation; and, in some degree, and for some time, apostatised from the cause of righteousness? Have not they themselves mournfully acknowledged it afterwards? Can any then be so insufferably vain and arrogant, as to imagine that nothing can ever lead them astray, or in any degree darken their understandings, or corrupt their hearts? Is it not most natural for every one who loves the good and virtuous part, and delights in the practice of it, to wish that he may have the assistance of a superior guide, to conduct him safely thro' all the snares which may be spread for him in a degenerate world? In a word, every one who is thoroughly sensible of his own weakness, and of the innumerable dangers to which virtue is exposed in the present disordered state of things, will see sufficient reason for lifting up his soul to God in these emphatical prayers of the devout Psalmist, *Psalm cxix. 33, -37.* "Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, and I shall keep it unto the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law, yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart. Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight. Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not unto covetousness. Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken thou me in thy way."

To all which, it may be added, That, if ever any person appeared in the world, who

could plead that he had no need of prayer, Jesus might have done it: He felt a perpetual good-will to all mankind, and was animated by it to go about in an uniform and unwearied course of beneficence; he was quite unmov'd with the temptations of the world, and walk'd on in the execution of his great undertaking, with an undaunted and victorious pace, in spite of all opposition; and yet we learn from the history of his life, that he was frequently employed in prayer, as well as recommended it to his followers: Surely then, no one else can pretend that he is above the need of prayer, and other acts of devotion.

Again, "It is objected, that, whatever use
 " prayer may be of, for direction and assistance
 " in the paths of virtue; surely it can be of
 " none, for the obtaining the pardon of sin,
 " and deliverance from those punishments,
 " which are threatned to be inflicted on sinners,
 " in this, and an eternal world: For if sin de-
 " serves punishment, and if punishment is ne-
 " cessary to frighten us from continuing in
 " it; how can prayers for forgiveness secure us
 " from those sufferings, which are intended by
 " our kind Creator for our reformation and a-
 " mendment?" To this it may be answered,
 That a sense of our faults, humble confession of
 them, and earnest entreating the divine mercy
 to forgive them, are very proper means of
 promoting a penitent disposition in us; they na-
 turally anticipate the necessity of punishments,
 destined for our reformation; by them we in a
 gentler manner attain to the end of such punish-
 ments, without having suffered them: And
 thus

thus prayers, for the pardon of sin, may be of unspeakable advantage, as they contribute to produce that temper of mind in us, which leads to an alteration in our conduct, and consequently secures us from those punishments which must have ensued either on our past transgressions, or our persisting in the like course of iniquity.

Before we finish this head, it may be proper to observe, that others argue against praying for the pardon of sin in another manner: "What occasion can there possibly be," (say they,) "for praying to God to forgive our sins? our sins are owing to the invincible force of temptations; and so are only the unavoidable frailties of our nature; and surely an infinitely good God can never call us to a severe account for them." As this is an important matter, on which our highest and eternal interest depends, it greatly concerns us to take care that we do not deceive ourselves: Let us attend to the voice of revelation, and of reason; and we shall find that they jointly proclaim, with the highest solemnity, that sin shall not pass unpunished. Harken to that awful declaration of holy writ, *Gal. vi. 7.* "Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap, for he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption: But, he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting." That is, our everlasting state hereafter, depends upon our behaviour here. As surely as he who sows wheat or barley in the seed-time, shall reap the same kind of grain in the harvest, and no other; so certainly shall those who live a wicked life here,
be

be miserable hereafter. Is it not amazing, that mankind are not struck with this tremendous declaration? The reason of this must be, that they do not in earnest believe it. Every man believes, that if he sows the seeds of thistles and thorns, he cannot reap wheat or barley; but, every one does not believe, that if he lives a vicious and impious life here, he cannot enjoy happiness hereafter: What is the reason why we believe the former, and doubt of the latter, since they are equally true? The reason is plainly this: That we have observed the course of nature in the frequent returns of seed-time and harvest; and find by undoubted experience, that it is an invariable law of the natural world, that whatever kind of grain is sown, the same kind, and no other, is reap'd in the harvest. But we have not yet seen one whole year, one full period of the government of the rational world: We have only seen the seed-time of human life; the harvest is yet to come, the great year is not completed, at least, within our view: But, as soon as we enter into the invisible world, we shall be convinced, that it is an unalterable law of the moral as well as of the natural world, that, whatever a man sows, that he also reaps: There we shall see what dreadful misery springs out of vice, and what further punishments are inflicted on it; what unspeakable happiness grows out of virtue, and with what additional joy it is crown'd. But, further, let us consider, that, tho' we had not those solemn declarations of divine revelation, we should have just reason to dread the consequences of criminal indulgence, both in this, and in an after-state. For, when

when we attend to the conduct of divine Providence, we see that vice is actually punished at present, in a certain degree; which gives natural ground to fear that it may be punished in an higher degree hereafter. The natural deformity of vice, the pangs of remorse which accompany it, the havock which it makes of the beauty, the order and peace of our minds, the direful effects of it, in the bodies, fortunes, families, and characters of those who indulge themselves in it without controul; plainly intimate, or, rather, loudly proclaim, that the Governour of the world is engaged against it, and will not suffer it to pass unpunished: Now, has the great author of nature begun to chastise, and punish sin here; and what ground is there then to hope that he will favour it hereafter? What shadow of reason is there for flattering ourselves, that the measures and laws of divine conduct shall be altered? The other world is only a succeeding period of the same government, under the same Governour, in which we have all possible reason to believe the same fundamental laws of rewarding virtue, and punishing vice, shall continue in full force. It certainly then greatly concerns us, not to cherish an indifference and fearlessness, with regard to what may be hereafter, under the righteous government of God. To think or speak in a slight and unconcerned manner, as to what may happen in any period of the divine government, is unspeakable irreverence, and manifest impiety: But, to live at random, without regarding the divine law, and the tremendous sanctions of it, is madness, and impiety to such a pitch, as must astonish, and strike every thinking person with terror.

terror. Let us beware then of trusting to mistaken notions of the boundless benignity and mercy of the great Parent of all. Do we allow that it is consistent with the most perfect goodness to inflict just punishments on wickedness here? (and allow it we must; for, we see that, in fact, it is done:) by what train of reasoning, then, shall we be able to show, that it is inconsistent with the same perfect goodness, to punish it with greater severity hereafter?

5thly. It is objected, "That those who seem to delight in prayer, do not appear to be better, happier, or more successful than those who neglect or condemn it. Where do we find God interposing for the prosperity of the pious, or where are these happy effects of devotion we are taught to expect?" In answer to this, it may be observed, that there are different sorts of persons, who pray from very different views and intentions: some pray with no other nor higher view, than that they may gain a character as religious; which may be of use to them in the prosecution of some worldly design. Others use prayer as a kind of charm, to render them acceptable to God, or as an atonement and compensation to him, for those lusts of their hearts, which they are unwilling to mortify, and those iniquities of their lives, which they still continue to commit. Now, both these sorts of praying people are to be thrown out of the question: and it is to be confin'd to those who pray, with simplicity and sincerity of heart; who have no other aim in praying, but that they may become better men, that they may know the will of God more clearly, and may obey it with more constancy

stancy and alacrity, and who trust in God, that he
“ will be to them a sun and shield, will give them
“ grace and glory, and withhold no good thing
“ from them, because they walk uprightly.” If
it be ask’d, What the better are these persons for
their habitual course of prayer, and other acts of
devotion? The answer is plain, that, tho’ they
are not, perhaps, distinguished with outward pro-
sperity, yet they are rewarded with inward en-
joyments of a higher and nobler kind. What
tho’ God has not bestowed, houses, lands, riches,
pleasures, honour, strength, or beauty, upon the
pious man? these are only outward good things,
uncapable of giving true happiness to the posses-
sors of them. But, if he has given him greater
blessings, wisdom, virtue, truth, integrity,
temperance, humility, meekness, contentment,
and contempt of the world, with all that inward
peace, joy, confidence in himself, and hope of
immortality which accompanies them; these are
the true riches, the real treasures of the immortal
soul: these are such treasures, as calamity, dan-
ger, death, can never rob it of. ’Tis true, these
inward pleasures, these mental possessions, are
not discerned by spectators: but those who feel
and enjoy them, cannot doubt of their superior
worth and excellence. As ’tis well known, that
many of those who put on an air of happiness, and
whose outward splendor and flourishing circum-
stances create admiration and envy in ignorant
beholders, carry about with them secret pains,
and inward stings, which greatly diminish, if not
intirely destroy, their apparent happiness and
contentment; so, it is as certain, that the sincere
worshippers of God, even when in the lowest
F state,

state, and most struggling circumstances, enjoy many silent pleasures, and secret consolations, which give them greater happiness, than worldly men ever taste amidst their greatest gaiety and abundance. He who is conscious that he possesses, in the main, that temper and disposition of mind which is acceptable to God, and who maintains an assured trust and confidence in the mercy and goodness of his Creator, enjoys an inward rest and composure of mind, which cannot be describ'd. It is called, in Holy Scripture, "the peace of God that passeth all understanding:" It is an inward calmness and tranquillity, like to that of the highest heavens. He that enjoys it, is easy within himself, and pleasing to those around him. He is free from those inward disturbances and anxieties which disquiet the souls of other men. His conversation is pleasant, and his tranquillity appears in the chearful air of his countenance, tho' silent: his mind is open to taste, with full relish, all those good things which Providence has provided for sweetning the journey of human life. But, why do I call this happy state of mind, tranquillity only!—It is far beyond mere calmness or tranquillity.—There may be a perfect tranquillity and calmness in the air, tho' the day be overcast with thick mists and clouds. The state of the pious man's mind is like a calm and serene day, enlightened and enlivened with the brightest sun-shine. The truly devout man is not barely content with his lot, acting the part assigned him, however low it may be, to the best of his power: his soul rises up above contentment, to joyful thankfulness and praise. He rejoices in that existence, into
which

which he is lately entered, and in that rank of creatures to which he is advanced. When he considers that he is admitted to be a spectator of the glorious works of nature around him, and that he is not only made capable of contemplating the beauty and order, the grandeur and magnificence of them; but of adoring, praising, resembling and enjoying the great Creator and sustainer of them, he is transported with wonder, gratitude, and praise. If these are my enjoyments (says he to himself,) in this first stage of my existence, when my faculties are only beginning to open and unfold themselves; what new scenes, what nobler and more magnificent entertainments may I expect shall be presented to my view, while my faculties are improving^{ly} and enlarging thro' millions of ages? What divine, what inconceivable joys, must break in upon me, if I should be admitted to survey all the bright and illustrious scenes of Providence, in the many other parts of God's great dominions, and thro' all the successive periods of his righteous government? But, what must my state be, when I shall see my Maker himself, "not darkly, as through a glass, but face to face?"—Here, language, imagination fail me.—Sure I am, it must be something that will be a fountain of unspeakable delight and everlasting rapture. "Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive those great things God hath laid up in store for those that love him."

The last objection I shall take notice of, is this, "That prayer can be of no importance; for, since all things are already fixed by an un-

“alterable decree of God, all those whom he
 “has determined to be good and happy, shall
 “certainly be so, whether they pray or not.”
 In answer to this, Let it be observed, that none
 ever maintained that God hath determined events
 to happen without any means. Now we have
 shewn that prayers are the means of obtaining spi-
 ritual blessings; and therefore, if we desire these
 spiritual blessings absolutely necessary to our hap-
 piness, we must as earnestly incline to the use of
 all the necessary means to prepare ourselves for
 receiving them, and which are not ordinarily ap-
 pointed but to such as are thus properly prepared
 to receive and improve them. Does any one e-
 ver pretend to reason thus; If it be decreed that
 I shall be wise and learned, I shall undoubtedly
 become so, tho’ I should never converse, read,
 think, or exercise my understanding in any way?
 Did ever any one seriously expect he would ar-
 rive at knowledge and wisdom by the mere force
 of an eternal decree, while he rejected all the
 means of attaining it? Did ever the husband-
 man sit down and reason thus with himself; If it
 be determined in the eternal decree of God, that
 I shall have a plentiful crop, I shall certainly
 reap it in the harvest, tho’ I neither manure nor
 sow my field in the seed-time? Now, if prayer is
 the mean of rendering us virtuous and happy, it
 is as absurd to expect we shall arrive at virtue and
 happiness without it, as it would be for the hus-
 bandman to hope he shall have his usual crop,
 tho’ he bestow none of his usual labour and in-
 dustry.

To conclude this head of the discourse, it may
 be proper to remark, that, after all that mankind

can

can do, to reason themselves into a persuasion of the uselessness and absurdity of devotion, there is still something within them, too strong, too mighty, for all their pretended demonstrations to conquer. The foundation for devotion is laid so deep in the human mind, that the utmost art and labour'd endeavours of a whole life cannot erase it. There are certain circumstances and situations of affairs, in which nature will break forth, and shew its force to be superior to all artificial reasonings: there are, I say, such circumstances in the course of almost every one's life, as will oblige the most hardened, obdurate neglecter or contemner of prayer, to lift up his soul to God with the utmost fervour. There are many such circumstances; but, as it would take up too much time to describe them all, we shall only mention a few of them. When one is reduced to the utmost extremity of distress, under the pressure of some great affliction, when relations, friends, physicians, stand around, but cannot give any relief, or administer any consolation; where is the man to be found, whose speculative opinions can then maintain their power over him; and restrain him from looking up unto God, and imploring aid and relief from him? In all cases too, of sudden and extreme danger, do not we see how naturally men fly to God, and invoke him with the utmost fervency, to help and deliver them? In like manner, when the poor, the weak, the friendless man, is sorely wronged, and grievously oppressed by the great and powerful ones of the earth, and sees no possible way of redress from men; Does he not call upon the great Judge of all, to protect the injured, and plead his righteous

teous cause? Again, when grievous crimes are laid to an honest man's charge, of which he is intirely innocent, especially when accompanied with such circumstances of probability, as that his friends, and those who are inclined to judge most favourably of him, cannot help suspecting that he is guilty; does he not then naturally appeal to the all-seeing and un-erring Judge, and entreat him to vindicate his innocence, and clear his good name? These things are felt in mankind, by a sudden impulse of nature, without any deliberate reflection. Beside these instances, we may take notice of the two following: *First*, When any one is about to leave the world, and bid an everlasting farewell to all the enjoyments of it; when all hope of restoration to health, or even of prolonging life in a lingering disease, is taken away; is there any one who can then abstain from praying, that the great and good Being, who brought him into the world, and led him thro' all the different stages of life, may continue his providential care, conduct him safely into the untry'd world of spirits, and be his guide thro' all the periods of his existence? And, *Secondly*, When any one stands by, and sees the expiring agonies of his dearest friend, for whom he felt the warmest love, and the highest esteem; in whom he reposed an unreserved confidence; when he sees that all those talents, virtues, and excellencies, which delighted his soul, are soon to cease, as to this world, can he help wishing and praying, with the utmost ardor, that such a soul, with all his virtues and accomplishments, may survive the dissolution of his mortal body, and that he may enjoy his delightful society in another

another and better situation of things, where there shall be no danger of death and separation any more?

But, why do I insist on these particular alarming circumstances, as the only proofs that mankind are determin'd, by the very frame of their nature, to have recourse to Almighty God? For, as soon as the faculties of the reasonable soul begin to open and unfold, it appears to be in a posture (I had almost said, in an Act,) of devotion. Do not we see all mankind breathing after knowledge and happiness? Do not they all pursue truth and happiness, however far mistaken they may be, as to the kind of it? This ardent desire in the human soul, is so natural, so essential to it, that, perhaps, there cannot be a juster, or better definition given of it, than that it is, a rational being panting for knowledge and happiness. It must be own'd, that these breathings of the soul (after truth and felicity,) are not directed immediately to God, nor explicitly expressed in words: and yet as there is no notion or conclusion of reason more natural, or obvious to the soul, than its dependence on God, and that he is the sovereign dispenser of its lot, the source from which all its excellency or happiness must flow; prayers are its most natural exercise, and even these instinctive desires may justly be called natural prayers. They discover a plain tendency of the soul towards God, the eternal fountain of light and happiness: they are sure indications, that there is some idea of truth and happiness inseparable from the human mind; and that there is a natural instinct in it, which leads all men to seek after and pursue some species

eies or another of good, and even to implore it from God.

From all these observations and reasonings, it is hoped we may conclude, that the neglecting or contemning of prayer, must be owing to prejudices, cherished and fortify'd with art and care; and not to any dictate of reason, or impartial inquiry into the state and tendency of the several workings of the human mind. But, after all that can be said in justification of prayer, we must acknowledge, that it is rather by the pure and refined feelings of a well-disposed heart, that any one can be brought to a full conviction of the worth and importance of this part of religion, than by the force of argument; which, at best, can only extort the cold assent of the understanding, or silence its vain reasonings.

We proceed now to the *third* thing proposed, namely, to point out the advantages which arise from the sincere and stedfast performance of this important duty. And, here,

In the *first* place, When we take the most general view of prayer, we cannot help discerning the usefulness and importance of it. When we consider that mankind, in their present state, are deeply immersed in the business or enjoyments of the world; that external objects are perpetually striking upon their senses, playing before their imaginations, and making impressions upon their hearts; it evidently appears to be an unspeakable advantage to them, to have regular and stated seasons, of recalling their minds from the numberless avocations of a vain world, and fixing them upon God, and spiritual things. The surest method of counterworking the impressions made

made on the soul by that crowd of worldly thoughts which pass thro' it, is to banish them intirely for some time, and lay it open by prayer and contemplation, to the impressions of those heavenly and eternal objects, which by their greatness, importance, and excellence, will engage and command attention. And, indeed, without proper seasons allotted to retirement and devotion, and frequently recurring, we are in the greatest danger imaginable of being under the full and uncontrolled power of these vain and perishing objects, which surround us in the world; and which are perpetually engaging the attention of our minds, and solliciting the love and affection of our hearts. Our Saviour, in the words of the text, takes notice of this, as the grand advantage of prayer, that it is a preservative against the temptations of the world. *Pray (says he,) that ye enter not into temptation.* Now, prayer has a natural tendency, in a great variety of ways, to break the force of those temptations to which we are necessarily exposed in life. It keeps alive in our minds an habitual sense of our danger; disposes us to keep a watchful eye on those things from which our danger arises; and puts us in a proper posture for resistance and defence.—It turns away our attention (as has just now been observed,) from those objects which raise impure desires and guilty passions in our bosoms. It calls up such a lively sense of the divine presence, as must check the first risings of irregular inclinations; and fill us with dread and shame, of thinking, saying, or doing any thing unworthy of those who aim at the approbation and favour of the great Judge of all. It presents the

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divine perfections to our view, and inspires us with an abhorrence of every thing that would render us unlike to them. Whenever therefore we are assaulted with a temptation to gratify any impure and violent appetite, or passion, let us accustom ourselves to stop, till we have lifted up our hearts to God, in sincere and fervent prayer, that he may assist us in the conflict, and give us the victory; and we shall soon feel the violence of the temptation abated, and that we are enabled to exert a hidden strength, and to obtain an intire mastery over it.

Secondly, As prayer fortifys us against temptations to sin; so, it inspires us with the love, and animates us to the practice of every virtue. By offering up our most earnest desires to God, that he may more and more beautify our souls with all worthy and good dispositions, our love to them is increased; and we are the more disposed to employ every proper mean of establishing and strengthening them in our hearts. When we pray that the venerable image of our Maker may be stamped upon us, the divine perfections are necessarily presented to our view, and contemplation; our love and admiration of them is heightened, and we are fired with the noble ambition of drawing nearer and nearer to them, by greater degrees of resemblance. When we contemplate the deformity and misery of vice, under the actual sense of the presence of God, and intreat him to preserve us from it, we cannot but look upon it with the highest indignation, and form the most stedfast resolutions to abandon it. When we view the beauty of holiness, as our Creator's glory, and lift up our souls to him in ardent prayers,

ers, to adorn us with it, we must feel our hearts warmed with the love of it, and lay ourselves under the strongest vows of adhering uniformly and invariably to it, through the whole course of our lives. When we give full vent to the ardent breathings of our souls after the love of God, gratitude to him, and confidence in him; these pious affections are immediately awakened, and strengthened in some degree in our hearts: and when we indulge ourselves in frequent and ardent prayers for the prosperity and welfare of our fellow-creatures; this exercise of the kind and benevolent affections contributes greatly to enliven and invigorate them: moreover, those views in which prayer presents our brethren of mankind to our minds, tend greatly to soften our hearts and heighten our goodness and tenderness for them: when we consider them as a part of the same great family of God, with ourselves; as partakers of the same nature, as liable to all the same dangers and distresses, as groaning under the same darkness of understanding, disorder of heart, and violence of passion; it will be impossible for us not to love and pity them with the greatest tenderness, and pray with the utmost ardor, that they may be at last established in some better and happier state.

Thirdly, Prayer puts us into the best frame and situation of mind for receiving the influences of heavenly light and grace. It promotes a certain softness and tenderness of heart, which renders the soul easily susceptible of the impressions of spiritual and divine objects: the soul, when duly softened and humbled by prayer, feels and sees in quite another manner than when it is

hardened and puffed up with pride and vanity. A deep sense of our ignorance disposes us to attend to, and follow every ray of light, how small soever: whereas, pride of understanding shuts out the light, and turns away the attention from it. We should therefore consider prayer, and exercise ourselves in it, as the great means appointed by God for drawing down that wisdom from above, which is necessary to guide us to our higher country, and to settle us in eternal rest and happiness, in our Father's house: See, for the proof of this, many solemn passages of Holy Scripture. *James* iv. 6. *Psalms* xxv. 9. *Isa.* lxvi. 2.

Fourthly, True devotion raises the human soul to an uncommon pitch of grandeur and elevation. The mind of man seems to adapt itself to the different nature of the objects with which it is conversant: it is contracted and debased, by being employed in little and low things; and it is proportionably enlarged and exalted, by the contemplation of those things which are great and sublime. The perfections of the Deity, his universal and eternal Providence, the excellence of virtue, and of those general laws of God which are the foundation and support of the order, the beauty, and happiness of his whole rational kingdom; the dignity and immortality of the human soul, whereby it is capable of vast and endless improvements; these are objects of such a striking and exalted nature, that they must ennoble and enlarge the mind employed in contemplating them. All worldly and transitory things must appear unworthy the love and pursuit of that soul, which is raised above all created things, and
which

which aspires to, and pursues that happiness, which arises from the love, the resemblance, and enjoyment of the great Creator of all. There is no greatness of mind equal to that which springs from the divine ambition of aiming at a resembling God; and from the glorious hope of seeing him as he is, in some future period of existence. "Now, are we the sons of God, but it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." 1 *John* iii. 2.

Fifthly, True devotion gives a wonderful strength, and firmness, to the soul which is under the full power and influence of it. That man must adhere with inviolable constancy to whatever is great or good in life, who is animated with the hope of the divine approbation, and who relies with assured confidence, on the friendship, protection, and assistance of the great Ruler of all things. No difficulties, no dangers can terrify him, who has that great Being on his side, who can make or destroy a world when he pleases. No temptations of pleasure or profit can allure him who trusts in an almighty friend, who is able to make him happy, in ten thousand methods, beyond what he can conceive. Every worldly thing vanishes at the presence of him, "before whom the whole world is as nothing, less than nothing, and vanity." Even death itself is stript of all its terrors, to the pious man; when it is considered only as a removing that vail of flesh, which interposes betwixt him and the invisible world. Nay, death itself is desirable; as it discloses new scenes of wonder and delight;
and

and admits the devout soul to the more immediate presence of its God, "where there are rivers of pleasures for evermore."

Since then prayer is a reasonable thing in itself; since there are so many, and so great advantages arising from the sincere and steadfast practice of it; it must be both our duty and our interest to continue *instant in it*. And that we may be animated with fervor and sincerity in the exercise of this part of our duty, let us frequently inculcate on ourselves, that we are weak, indigent, and ignorant creatures; and that we depend intirely on our Maker, for all we possess at present, or hope to enjoy hereafter. The first and most obvious reflection convinces us, that we are nothing of ourselves; but that it is by the Power of God we have our existence: No man was ever so presumptuous and absurd, as to imagine or assert that he was author and original to himself; and that he felt a mighty power by which he brought himself into being, and could continue himself in it as long as he pleased. Every one acknowledges that he finds nothing in his own nature to warrant his subsistence in this world, for one moment; and far less to ensure it for ever in another. Nay, even supposing our existence continued to us by that All-mighty Being who gave it, we are conscious that we cannot conduct ourselves surely to that state of perfection and happiness, which our natures are capable of, and for which they were designed. When we have view'd ourselves on all sides, we find we are in the most forlorn and helpless condition imaginable, without the friendship of a superior and almighty Being. In order to represent
our

our deplorable state without a firm reliance on the all-sustaining and all-conducting Providence of our great Creator, let us suppose, that, in a morning, when we awake, we should find ourselves sailing along, with all our nearest relations and dearest friends, in a wide, unconstant, and seemingly boundless ocean; where we see storms and tempests gathering around us, hovering over, and very soon to break upon us; being utterly incapable ourselves to steer our vessel to any safe harbour, and without any hope of assistance, either from men or invisible powers; so that we could expect no relief, but must be in perpetual dread of being tossed up and down at the pleasure of winds and waves, till we should be starved to death, or, until our vessel split upon some unseen rock, and we should sink to the bottom. Would not our case be extremely lamentable? Yet this is but a faint image of our state here in this world, without an assured trust in the Wisdom and Goodness of an invisible and almighty Friend, who will lead us safely thro' this dangerous voyage of human life, and land us at last on some peaceful shore.

We find ourselves placed here in a vast, and, to our view, a boundless World, and in the midst of an incomprehensible scheme of things: We know not whence we came, or whither we are going: we behold an eternity before us; but know not what shall befall us, while we continue here, at our departure hence, or in any period of that endless duration thro' which we may pass. We see other persons around us, of the same nature, and in the same circumstances with ourselves: they are as ignorant and as weak as we are; and can give us neither information nor assistance.

When

When we reflect on what passes within our bosoms, we must own, that our inward tranquillity is frequently disturbed and interrupted. Sometimes, indeed, pleasing desires, joyful hopes, and delightful affections, enliven and gladden our hearts: but, at other times, vain desires, alarming fears, and guilty passions, disquiet and torment them. It is not in our power, to preserve uniformly the gentle emotions, and happy effects of the former; or to banish intirely the unquiet workings and baneful influences of the latter. When we look back on that part of our life which is already past, we cannot avoid being self-condemned for many instances of sin and folly; which sometimes awaken within us dire forebodings of a just punishment awaiting us in some future period of our existence: and, when we look forward to that part of life which lies before us, we find reason to dread we shall be guilty of the same, or the like departures from the paths of wisdom and righteousness. Let any one retire from the noise and hurry of the world, and reflect seriously with himself upon his present state, as a state of trial, in which there is a certain path mark'd out to him by the great Author of his being; and that according as he walks in it, or departs from it, he shall be happy or miserable in this, and in another life: and after he has imprinted on his mind a just and awful sense of this interesting and important truth, that his eternal happiness depends upon his behaviour; let him further consider, that, through the weakness of his understanding, the strength of his passions, the fickleness of his best resolutions, and the numberless temptations of the world, he may be led
astray.

astray from the path of life; and he shall find himself struck with such a sense of his danger, as will force him to break out in these or such like meditations, intermix'd with prayers, "O my
" soul! how great is thy darkness, how deep is
" thy corruption, how manifold are the dangers
" to which thou art exposed in this thy passage
" thro' this world! thou knowest not where thy
" true happiness lies; thou art ignorant of the
" way that leads unto it; thou hast frequently
" wandred in a vain pursuit of false appear-
" ces of it; and thou art in the greatest danger
" of still wandering farther from it."

"O Father of lights, open mine eyes to see
" what my true happiness is; point out the road
" clearly that leads unto it; and never suffer me
" to depart from it. Send forth thy light and
" thy truth, let them lead me and bring me to
" that new heaven and new earth wherein dwel-
" leth righteousness: Guide me with thy coun-
" sel while here, and afterward receive me to
" glory."

Further, let the same person continuing his retirement and meditation, survey with seriousness and attention the whole extent of his duty to God, to mankind, and to himself, and the manifold awful obligations he lies under to fulfil it; and he shall scarce be able to contain himself from giving vent to the lively workings of his heart, in these or some such mournful acknowledgements, and ardent petitions.

"O my God, how faint and imperfect are
" my views of thy infinite perfection and glory!
" How little do I feel of that adoration and praise,
" that love and confidence, which are indispen-
sably

“fably due unto thee! Tho’ thou hast presented
 “unto my view the universal frame of nature,
 “which is a standing monument, a perpetual
 “remembrancer, of thy creating power, thy mar-
 “vellous wisdom, and *eternal Godhead*; tho’
 “thou hast made me capable of contemplating
 “the wondrous fabrick of the heavens, whose
 “august magnificence, immeasurable extent, and
 “beneficial influences on this lower world, af-
 “ford me at once a lively representation and
 “convincing evidence of thy infinite glory, thy
 “boundless immensity, and diffusive benignity;
 “tho’ thou hast placed me here in an apartment
 “of thy world, where I see thy inexhaustible
 “power and munificence, perpetually employ-
 “ed in raising up, supporting and providing for
 “innumerable families of thy creatures around
 “me; tho’ thou hast given me an organized bo-
 “dy, fearfully and wonderfully made; bearing
 “the strongest marks of divine wisdom, and kind
 “intention, in the contrivance of every part and
 “member of it; tho’ thou hast placed a noble
 “inhabitant within, whose faculties and dispo-
 “sitions, with a capacity of endless improve-
 “ment in knowledge and virtue, are the surest
 “proof, and truest image of thy infinite wisdom
 “and perfect goodness; nay, tho’ thou hast fa-
 “voured me with a revelation of thy will, con-
 “taining the clearest and most express discove-
 “ries of thy perfections; and of what adoration,
 “praise, and confidence, are due to them: yet,
 “alas! all these various and striking manifesta-
 “tions thou hast given me of thyself, make but
 “very feeble and transient impressions upon my
 “heart. How manifest is the disorder of all the
 “powers

“ powers of my soul! The insignificant and
 “ transitory pleasures, riches, and honours of
 “ this vain world, employ my understanding,
 “ strike upon my imagination, and captivate my
 “ heart; while thy perfect excellence, thy un-
 “ bounded goodness, and eternal providence, are
 “ either intirely disregarded by me, or thought
 “ upon with a stupid coldness and indifference.

“ O heavenly Father, author of every good
 “ and perfect gift, rectify all the disorders of
 “ my soul! restore all my faculties to their ori-
 “ ginal and worthiest employment! May it
 “ henceforth be my chief delight to contemplate
 “ thee, in all the discoveries thou hast made of
 “ thyself, in thy wondrous works, and in the
 “ revelations of thy will! Give me such clear
 “ and affecting views of thy supreme glory and
 “ excellence, as shall kindle that flame of love
 “ to thee, in my breast, which shall never be
 “ extinguished, but burn stronger and stronger
 “ every day! Penetrate my heart with such a
 “ deep sense of all thy mercies to me, and of
 “ thy constant bounty to thy whole creation, as
 “ shall stir up all that is within me to bless and
 “ praise thy name, for ever and ever! Establish
 “ my soul in such a firm persuasion of the infi-
 “ nite goodness and wisdom of thy universal and
 “ everlasting providence, as shall engage me to
 “ throw myself, and all my great interests upon
 “ it, with a boundless confidence! O Lord of
 “ Hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee!
 “ I shall be kept in perfect peace, when my
 “ mind is stayed on thee.

“ I must acknowledge before thee, the search-
 “ er of hearts, that I discern and feel other

“ marks of depravity in my nature, besides an
“ habitual forgetfulness of thy unchangeable
“ goodness, and a stupid insensibility of thy in-
“ expressible glory and greatness. Thou hast
“ surrounded me here in thy world, with my fel-
“ low creatures, the children of thy family; and
“ made me capable of exercising kind affections
“ towards them; of rejoicing with them in their
“ prosperity; of sympathizing with them in their
“ adversity; and of performing kind offices to
“ them in every state: but, alas! how often
“ have I failed in this part of my duty! I am
“ conscious to myself, that my friendly affecti-
“ ons, at best, are but too weak, and limited;
“ frequently interrupted, sometimes overcome,
“ by the workings of the selfish and interested
“ passions. O great Father of all, who art love,
“ and dwellest in love, teach me to imitate thy
“ perfect and universal goodness! Enlarge my
“ heart to embrace the whole human kind! Make
“ me feel a perpetual flow of goodwill to all thy
“ children around me! Check the growth,
“ nay, kill the seeds, of all malice, envy, and
“ ill-will in my bosom! Raise me to that hap-
“ py state, in which I shall forget myself, and
“ place my chief delight in spreading peace,
“ joy, and happiness all around me, to the ut-
“ most of my power! Let all the tender and ge-
“ nerous affections increase in strength, in fer-
“ vour, and extent, in my soul; till I become
“ fit to be transplanted into that happy kingdom,
“ where peace and concord, love and friend-
“ ship, reign in full perfection for ever and e-
“ ver.

“ O my soul, under how many hinderances
of

“ of thy improvement and progress toward per-
“ fection dost thou labour! The appetites and
“ passions of thy mortal body, interrupt the ex-
“ ercise of the nobler affections, weaken the
“ sense of what is heavenly and divine; and u-
“ surp that dominion which belongs unto thee.
“ Under their tumultuous government thy un-
“ derstanding is darkened, thy affections corrup-
“ ted, and thy inward tranquillity almost quite
“ destroyed. O God, who hast the hearts of all
“ men in thy hand, and turnest them whither-
“ soever thou pleasest, establish thou that part of
“ me, which is immortal and divine, in its just
“ supremacy; Subject all my lower passions to
“ its authority; and make me to enjoy that in-
“ ward composure, and serenity, which is al-
“ ways to be found under its gentle sway! O
“ thou righteous Judge of all the earth, who
“ renderest to every one according to his works,
“ when I take a calm and serious review of all
“ the motions of my heart, and actions of my
“ life, I must acknowledge with deep regret,
“ that I find many things which I cannot ap-
“ prove; nay, many things for which I am self-
“ condemned; and which I cannot recall to my
“ remembrance, without feeling the peace of my
“ mind sensibly disturbed, my confidence in thee
“ greatly damped, and the awful dread of thy
“ displeasure strongly awakened.

“ Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-
“ suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,
“ keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving ini-
“ quity, transgression and sin; forgive my in-
“ numerable follies and transgressions; deliver
“ me from the dreadful consequences of them,
“ and

Conclusion.

“ and punishments due to them, in this and an
“ eternal world! whatever moral imperfections
“ are still remaining in me; direct me to the
“ knowledge of them, and to the proper means
“ of removing them. Whenever I wander
“ from thee, thou eternal fountain of light and
“ life! shew me my error, tho’ it should be by
“ fatherly correction; let pains or sorrows
“ bring me home; but never leave me to my-
“ self! direct me to the right improvement of
“ all the assistances thou hast afforded me, for
“ purifying and perfecting my nature! Teach
“ me to understand clearly, to believe firmly,
“ to value justly, and comply sincerely, with
“ that last and brightest revelation thou hast
“ given me by Jesus Christ: Give me a just
“ sense of the unmerited, unsolicited, and won-
“ derful friendship of the eternal Son of God;
“ who, tho’ he was rich, yet, for the sake of
“ apostate sons of men, became poor, and was
“ made flesh, and suffered, and died, that he
“ might enlighten their darkened understandings,
“ purify their corrupted hearts, exalt their de-
“ bascd natures, deliver them from the punish-
“ ments due unto their sins, set open the gates
“ of immortality before them, and conduct them
“ into the presence of their God. Teach me
“ to hearken to his divine instructions; to copy
“ after his spotless example; to approach to thee
“ by him, as my great Mediator; and to expect
“ the forgiveness of my sins, on the terms mar-
“ ked out in his gospel! Let the serious confi-
“ deration of my need of such a Saviour, beget
“ and preserve in me the deepest sense of my
“ own unworthiness; and let the consideration of
“ thy

Conclusion.

thy love and mercy in appointing him, to
be the Saviour of men, inspire me with the
humble and modest confidence of being re-
stored, by him, to the enjoyment of thy fa-
vour and friendship. Carry me still forward,
O heavenly Father! by all the methods of
thy providence and grace, in the paths of righ-
teousness, till I become fit to be transplanted
into the higher world of spirits; where I shall
live in everlasting security from all dangers;
where I shall no more bewail the darkness
of my understanding, and the disorder of my
heart; but where I shall see thee my Maker
unveiled; where I shall love thee entirely, re-
joice in thee triumphantly, and celebrate thy
praises to all eternity!

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